DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 684 EA 031 396

TITLE	Leadership for Student Learning: Restructuring School District Leadership. School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative: A Report of the Task Force on School District Leadership.
INSTITUTION	Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.; UPS Foundation, Inc., Greenwich, CT.; Metropolitan Life Foundation.; Ford Foundation, New York, NY.; Carnegie Corp. of New York, NY.
ISBN	ISBN-0-937846-18-X
PUB DATE	2001-02-00
NOTE	40p.; Based on the Task Force meeting in July 2000.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036. Tel: 202-822-8405; Fax: 202-872-4050. For full text: http://www.iel.org.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Boards of Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Leadership Responsibility; Public Schools; *School Districts; *School Restructuring; *Superintendents

ABSTRACT

This report displays the themes and concerns that worried a cross-section of carefully selected educators and leaders in government, business, and civic groups. While failing to agree completely on the nature of the problems or their solutions, Task Force members were in accord on two conclusions: that district leaders must focus on the goal of improving student learning and that the school system must be organized in such a way as to make this its fundamental priority. Many school board members and superintendents say they do not have the training to handle all the new demands being placed on them. It is not surprising that there is a shortage of applicants for superintendent vacancies. Most school district leadership requires organizational leadership, public leadership, and instructional leadership. One model of leadership arrangement is policy governance with strict delineation of the board as policymaker and the superintendent as administrator. Nontraditional leadership patterns feature collaborative relationships where senior staff members share responsibilities that traditionally are handled by one person. Superintendents now may be corporate lawyers, business executives, or military officers. Strategies for district restructuring involve planning for recruitment and succession, creating and maintaining an informed leadership base, building a learning organization, and holding leadership accountable. (Contains 24 references.) (RKJ)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

EA

ED 458 684

Leadership for Student Learning:

Restructuring School District Leadership

School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative

A Report of the Task Force on School District Leadership

February 2001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Clarke

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Institute for Educational Leadership

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PROJECT STAFF

Michael Usdan, *Project Director*
Barbara McCloud, *Project Associate Director*
Mary Podmostko, *Project Associate*
Larry Cuban, *Senior Project Consultant, Stanford University*

FUNDERS

This publication was made possible by grants from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the United States Department of Education, the Ford Foundation, the UPS Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Metropolitan Life Foundation. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

ABOUT IEL

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)—a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, D.C.—helps individuals and institutions work together across boundaries to achieve better outcomes for children and youth. IEL's work is focused through five program areas: developing and supporting leaders; strengthening school-family-community connections; improving the policy, program and practice systems that serve children and youth; governing; and improving preparation for work. In conducting its work, IEL employs a variety of strategies including providing technical assistance; hosting conferences and workshops; conducting research and disseminating reports; and developing and supporting networks, alliances and coalitions. At the heart of IEL's effectiveness is its unique ability to bring people together at the local, state and federal levels to find solutions across policy and program boundaries.

For more information on the initiative:
Mary Podmostko, *Project Associate*
Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-8405, ext. 31
Fax (202) 872-4050
podmostkom@iel.org
www.iel.org

Project staff would like to express gratitude for the input of George R. Kaplan, Martin J. Blank, Elizabeth L. Hale, Hunter N. Moorman and KSA-Plus Communications, Inc.

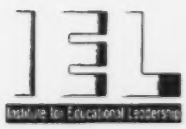
© 2001 by the Institute of Educational Leadership, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced in any way without the express written permission of the publisher.

ISBN 0-937846-18-X

Leadership for Student Learning:

Restructuring School District Leadership

School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative
A Report of the Task Force on School District Leadership
February 2001



The Initiative

The aim of the *School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative* is to heighten public awareness of the huge and persistent problems that confront the leadership echelons of the nation's public schools. By engaging a healthy, often skeptical mix of partners from government, business, civic groups and other sectors, as well as education itself, this Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)-led effort has the larger goal of sparking action that will ultimately help to strengthen the nation's public schools. Its controlling premise is that more effective leadership, a largely overlooked imperative of the educational reform movement, is a significant, even crucial, force in efforts to improve America's schools.

Four carefully selected task forces met for a day and a half each during the spring and summer of 2000 to probe and suggest ways to improve leadership at state and district levels and by principals and teachers. In frank and open sessions, the task forces discussed, debated, and critiqued a broad span of research findings, theories of educational change, and their members' own considerable experience in the field. Out of their sessions came creative suggestions and, unsurprisingly, more than a few frustrations.

Leadership issues in education are complicated and multidimensional, and they are bound to stir passionate controversy whenever and wherever they arise. This was clearly the case for the Task Force On School District Leadership. Some topics recurred with predictable and persistent regularity. Others appeared once or twice and were all but forgotten thereafter. If this diverse group converged on one point of agreement, though, it was surely that there is no single, one-size-fits-all arrangement or model for leading all of the nation's schools.

Much of what may appear to be repetitive in this report reflects the uneven emphases that pervaded the meeting. As they worked their way through their principal agenda items, the participants found that certain themes were common to several facets of district leadership. This is reflected in the report.

TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Co-Chairs

Becky Montgomery, *Chair*, St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education, St. Paul, Minnesota

Rod Paige, *Secretary*, United States Department of Education, Washington, DC; former Superintendent of Schools, Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

Members

Gina Burkhardt, *Executive Director*, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Naperville, Illinois

Bonnie Copeland, *President*, Fund for Educational Excellence, Baltimore, Maryland

Cynthia Guyer, *Executive Director*, Portland Public Schools Foundation, Portland, Oregon

Clifford Janey, *Superintendent of Schools*, Rochester City School District, Rochester, New York

Dale Kalkofen, *Vice President for District Services*, New American Schools, Arlington, Virginia

Dannel Malloy, *Mayor*, Stamford, Connecticut

Gary Mielcarek, *Public Affairs Manager*, United Parcel Service Airlines, Louisville, Kentucky

James Shelton, *President*, LearnNow Inc., New York, New York

Marla Ucelli, *Director of District Redesign*, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, New York, New York

Edward Lee Vargas, *former Superintendent of Schools*, Ysleta Independent School District, El Paso, Texas

James Woolfolk, *President*, Saginaw Board of Education, Saginaw, Michigan

Restructuring School District Leadership

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE 1

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP THEN AND NOW 2

RESTRUCTURING SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP 8

- Three Related Types of Leadership
- Where are the "Models?"

STRATEGIES FOR RESTRUCTURING 12

- Planning for Recruitment and Succession
- Creating and Maintaining an Informed Leadership Base
- Building a Learning Organization
- Holding Leadership Accountable

TAKING OWNERSHIP 25

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS 26

LEADERSHIP IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD 27

- Suggested Questions

SPEAK UP 30

REFERENCES 31

Preface

Of the seemingly endless lineup of problems school districts face today, the critical need for strong, responsible, and enlightened leadership should be at or near the top. The nation and its policy-framers already know about the threats to stability and reform presented by record enrollments, shortages of teachers, school security, dilapidated buildings, state-mandated accountability measures, evolving technologies, the social and economic circumstances of students, and a host of other chronic challenges. But without topflight leadership by school boards, district superintendents, and key central office staffers, there is no credible way to deal with them in the constructive, creative, and yet economical manner they deserve. This fact of life about American public education has been shunted aside for far too long. It is long past time for it to surface as a major issue on the nation's domestic policy agenda.

Fortunately, there is a powerful and growing consensus, at least at the level of rhetoric, in the country today that it is up to district leaders to provide sound, productive teaching and learning geared to high standards for students drawn from a rapidly changing population. But when rhetoric has to evolve into action, this emphasis often proves difficult to sustain. Leadership roles are too often ill-defined, in conflict and inadequately suited to contemporary needs. Too, individuals in positions of leadership are frequently ill-prepared for the rigors of their ever more demanding jobs. Increasingly, we are witnessing excessive turnovers of superintendents with the attendant drop in the quality of leadership. Sadly, the workings of governance, administration, leadership, and responsibility in many of the nation's school districts are a half-century old, but recognition in states and communities that this is the case has been slow in coming. Leadership and governance still have to fight for places on the list of reform priorities.

This report of the Initiative's Task Force on School District Leadership is designed to help spotlight leadership as a major concern nationally, in the states, and at the local level. Based as it is on the experience of hands-on leaders in the field as well as the best of contemporary literature, it should have special appeal in state education circles and in school districts. The issues and practices described here are not necessarily the only ones worth exploring, but they do represent ways that Task Force members believe school districts should be run.

While failing to agree completely on the nature of the problems or their solutions, Task Force members were in accord on two broad conclusions: 1) district leaders absolutely must focus their actions on the common goal of improving student learning, and 2) the school system must be organized in such a way as to make this its fundamental priority, the one that matters far more than any other.

We emphasize that this is neither a definitive report nor a detailed discussion guide on school district leadership at the turn of the century. Countless books, scholarly articles, commission reports, and popular media accounts (some of them exceptionally insightful, others less so) of the past 25 years have already been there. Rather, it is intended as a display of the themes and concerns that worried a cross-section of carefully selected educators and others as the new century began.

All quotations highlighted in this report are taken from the record of participants in the meeting of the Task Force on School District Leadership in July 2000.

District Leadership Then and Now

Today's local school boards evolved from the town meetings and governments of selectmen established in Massachusetts in the late 1700s. In the beginning, they controlled nearly every aspect of school administration, including collecting taxes, hiring and managing teachers, managing facilities, and testing students. Bit by bit, local communities separated school governance from general governance at different times beginning in the late 1700s and into the early 1900s, usually when the demands of managing increasingly complex public education systems became too burdensome for county, city and municipal governments. The extent and nature of the separation varied based on state statutes, regulations, court decisions, and legal opinions as well as the expectations, traditions, and character of citizen involvement in diverse local districts. However, one hardy truth has been and will presumably remain constant: local school districts are creations of the states.

School boards did not hire full-time superintendents until the 1830s, when growing school populations made it nearly impossible for unpaid, part-time board members to manage schools. School boards ceded power to superintendents tentatively at first, and it was not unusual for a district to hire a superintendent and later return school management to the board. Some of the tensions between school boards and superintendents have been destructive; others have been synergistic.

For most local public education systems, the interplay between district governance and management has undergone little serious change in the last century, despite dramatic shifts in the size, demographic makeup and instructional responsibilities of school districts. One of the ironies (and shortcomings) of the school reform movement of the past two decades, for example, is that it has largely ignored such indisputably important players as school superintendents, school board members, and central office administrators. Without the effective participation of such ground-level local leaders, it is hard to imagine school systems functioning effectively. If they are to be more productive advocates for quality education, these grass roots leaders need public support, and they must be prepared to adjust to profound change on many fronts.

Here are some of the principal forces they must be prepared to tackle:

Changing Priorities. District leaders are operating in an environment of ever-shifting priorities. During the first half of the 20th century, says the conventional wisdom, district management could be defined by "the four B's": Bonds, Budgets, Buses and Buildings. By the 1970s, it had become "the four R's"—Race, Resources, Relationships and Rules—as heretofore mostly ignored groups such as members of minority groups, teachers, students, and communities began asserting themselves. Priorities shifted again in the 1980s when the contemporary school reform movement gained traction. Today, district leaders must concern themselves with a host of different concerns: "the four A's": Academic standards, Accountability, Autonomy and Ambiguity and "the five C's": Collaboration, Communication, Connection, Child advocacy and Community building.

The "five C's" reflect the essential role schools play in the life of the local community and as advocates for children whose social, behavioral, and academic patterns virtually dictate new kinds of links between schools and community resource providers, businesses, and other organizations that can provide resources and expertise. Now more than ever before, districts must maintain constant contact with a bewildering array of internal and external stakeholders to share information and request feedback on a range of issues from closing schools in inclement weather to core issues about what students are expected to learn.

In one form or another, all but a few states have adopted new, tougher ***academic standards*** for all students, a radical change from the time when only 25 to 30 percent of students were expected to get

the kind of high quality education that would allow them, for example, to go to college. Accompanying the new standards are more stringent ***accountability*** rules, including incentives for students and schools to improve and penalties if they do not. Many states now have "report cards" for districts and schools, not just for students, that are released annually with much fanfare. A district's rating on its report card can affect everything from the continued tenure of the superintendent to the market value of homes in the community. This represents a sea change for district leaders, since districts and schools were traditionally accountable for managing the educational process, not for getting specific academic results, which is, of course, a far more difficult assignment. Significantly, district superintendents and school board members customarily have not been asked to play a major role in developing the state policies on accountability as well as the other issues that are currently driving school reform.

Current wisdom also holds that helping students reach today's more demanding standards can be most effectively accomplished if educators and board members alike have more ***autonomy*** to do their jobs. At the state level, policy-makers are supposed to set the standards and monitor performance while granting districts the freedom to set their own policies to achieve the goals. As their part of the bargain, districts are delegating more autonomy to principals, who, in turn, are expected to entrust teachers with more latitude at the classroom level—as long as the goals are met. Such decentralization reverses decades of top-down control and explicit, detailed mandates.

But how much autonomy and what degree of flexibility serve the best interests of a district's schools? Answering these core questions has become the direct responsibility of district leaders, but both school board members and superintendents are finding that they must resolve the ***ambiguity*** inherent in their relationships, roles and responsibilities before much else can be accomplished.

Focusing Simultaneously on Many Things. If the basic function of districts is to help students meet newly raised academic standards, it becomes increasingly important that leaders at *all* levels—teachers, principals and superintendents—become more expert in teaching and learning, that in practice and not just in theory, they become genuine leaders for student learning. Many superintendents do not possess the knowledge, training, or skills demanded of today's instructional leaders, yet they manage complex enterprises that do much more than teach "the three R's." Their ever-expanding portfolios now embrace such once-unlikely areas as driver education, career preparation, sex education, adult literacy, character education, before- and after-school care, technology training, guidance counseling, multiple social services, and managing inter-agency initiatives with local governments. Sorting these and others out has become a complex, time-devouring chore that all too often offers minimal rewards, little satisfaction, and no new respect.

Board members and superintendents are now tackling more complex and sophisticated demands on their time and energy than at any time in the history of education in America. Students are bringing a whole new load of social and behavioral problems to the school which cannot be ignored or minimized. The circumstances of families and communities are far different in dozens of important ways. For their part, our schools have been asked to incorporate into the curriculum issues and topics which many observers (and critics) believe detract from the essential academic mission. A year into the new century, we have not yet sorted out what issues we expect the schools to address on their own and which they should take up in concert with other community organizations, agencies, and, in many instances, parents.

"The knowledge is not the problem; it's the implementation that's the issue."

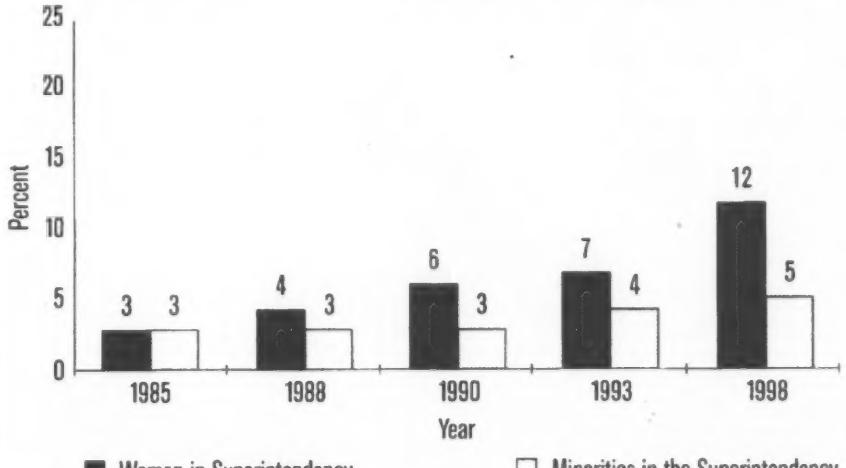
Leading and Managing Diversity. District leaders increasingly are hampered by a demographic misfit. Trained to deal with relatively homogeneous student bodies, they are instead managing dis-

tricts that are populated by students who reflect the growing diversity of the United States. Harold Hodgkinson, Director of the Center for Demographic Policy at IEL has noted, " . . . the implications of demographics for education are enormous. You ignore this field at your peril." School districts are becoming increasingly non-white. The percentage of school age children who were members of a minority group rose from 26 in 1980 to 35 percent in 2000, and the U.S. Department of Education projects that this number will increase to 64 percent by 2100.

Obviously, the issues of cultural competence for district leaders will soon move to center stage. More than ever, we are seeing students and school leaders of totally different backgrounds. We must deal with such disparities as well as with the growing problem of changing academic expectations for students who are not adequately prepared to meet them. Clearly, schools will have to create programs and systems responsive to the special needs of a diverse, multiethnic student body. Effective leadership in the contemporary multicultural environment will require different understandings of more complex issues compared to 30 years ago.

By and large, the demographics of district populations are still not reflected in school district leadership. The top-level berths of the district executive hierarchy are overwhelmingly held by white men in the latter half of their careers. Only about 12 percent of superintendents are women, and only five to ten percent of superintendents are nonwhite. The situation is a little better in school boards, where in 1997, 44 percent of all board members were women (a huge majority of them elected, not appointed), but fewer than ten percent were minority group members, according to data from the National School Boards Association (NSBA). The same source also documents that about 85 percent of all board members were over 40 years old—slightly older, on average, than board members of a decade earlier. About 75 percent held college degrees, and most had advanced degrees. The lack of diversity in the superintendency and on school boards will make it very difficult for school district organizations to sensitize themselves to significant cultural transformations occurring all around them.

Women and Minorities in the Superintendency, 1985–98



Source: Hodgkinson, H.L. & Montenegro, X. (1999). *The U.S. School Superintendent: The Invisible CEO.* Superintendents Prepared. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Listening to the Citizenry. With education consistently ranked as the public's highest priority and with public concerns supposedly at record levels, district leaders increasingly have to be respectful of diverse group members who demand more representation and participation in decision-making. Although many Americans have a large investment in school affairs, several groups are especially worthy of mention:

- **Parents** appear to be better informed about and less satisfied with public education, especially in urban America, and they are less inclined to sit on the sidelines while district and school officials make decisions that directly affect their children in ways that may not be fully acceptable to them. As we are learning daily, parents now have such options as charter schools, home schooling, inter-district transfers and, in a few limited experiments, vouchers that students can use to attend any local public, private, or parochial school.
- The superintendent's cabinet and other **central office staff**, particularly in large urban districts, probably wield more authority than many people assume. These district employees frequently outlast the individual board members and superintendents who constitute the elected or appointed leadership of school districts. Conversely, in small districts, there may be no central office and, therefore, little continuity.
- **Business leaders** have taken an unprecedented interest in the schools that supply their future employees and affect local economic development. They are demanding a place at the reform table, have considerable potential clout, and tend to expect quick results.
- **State and local political leaders** are dictating accountability guidelines for local districts. They are also imposing new governance structures for low-performing schools, currently in such high-profile urban systems as Baltimore, Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland.
- **Community organizations, agencies, and institutions** view schools as possible focal points for their own work and want to support the student learning agenda of the school. This takes such varied forms as all-day open schools, collaborative preschool arrangements, community schools, and a growing list of others.

Dealing with Ambiguous Roles and Responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities of superintendents, senior administrators and school board members are increasingly complex and are often blurred or unclear, resulting in confusion between governance (the school board's nominal job) and management (the superintendent's). There is consensus that, in an ideal situation, school boards should focus on the "large picture" or "externals" of education: hiring and evaluating the superintendent; developing and popularizing the district's vision for education, setting goals and performance targets; measuring results and reporting them to the public (accountability); engaging the community as a resource for public education; approving and overseeing budgets, and other functions of roughly similar scope. Superintendents, on the other hand, must deal with the daily business of running school systems, which ideally centers on implementing the board's priorities. Unfortunately, it does not always work this way.

The absence of clear definitions of roles and responsibilities frequently results in micromanagement of administrative matters by school boards or, worse, individual members who may intervene inappropriately in aspects of school operations ranging from curriculum design to student transfers. Board members acting unilaterally usually press their personal agendas with the superintendent or district staff in ways that undermine managerial and organizational coherence. Part of the confusion arises from the uncertainty of board members in determining if they are members of a corporate body and trustees for the entire community or if they are representatives of specific constituents or

neighborhoods. Many school board members are elected to represent geographic areas within school districts and therefore need to balance the interests of the constituency which elected them with the needs of the entire system. Since community members may also view board meetings as an avenue for addressing complaints and requests, board members may not be clear on which legislative, judicial and executive responsibilities lie within their purview. Such board members may have little awareness of the impropriety of their actions, since they usually work without any binding professional standards.

The shift from trustee to politician appears to be a major factor altering the performance of too many school board members. School board memberships may be political steppingstones for some members, board composition may swing back and forth rapidly based on the election cycle, and board members may be driven by special interest or partisan agendas. All of these scenarios undercut stability over the long term. The approach in Houston, where the superintendent works with the community and civic leaders to 1) identify potential board members who will keep the best interests of the children in the forefront, and 2) provide community backing for the candidacies of such individuals is a way to promote greater stability in the system.

Another option is to have a local elected official deal with political issues while the superintendent addresses instructional ones, as is the case in Boston, where the lines of authority between a strong board ("committee" in Boston) and one of the nation's most respected superintendents are clearly marked and usually respected.

"An incoherent system causes people to act dysfunctionally."

Meeting New Learning Needs. By their own admission, many superintendents, as well as some board members, say they don't have the training to handle all the new demands being placed on them. Leading a school district was never easy, as the last 30 years of school desegregation, expansion of special education, school safety, and other community concerns with schools have demonstrated. But the preparation and continuing professional development of district leaders have not emerged as pressing matters, even as other fields such as business, technology, the military, and the federal civil service intensify their efforts to keep their senior officials up to speed. School board members usually have not possessed, nor felt that they needed, deep knowledge of education. The superintendent, almost always a former teacher or principal who had risen through the ranks, was usually able to comply with board members' orders, manage central office staff, keep the books balanced, and maintain orderly schools.

Superintendents, in particular, have seen their responsibilities multiply. In a recent study by Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), superintendents called for more support to ensure their well-being and job success, and more opportunities for professional training and counseling. But these have not been forthcoming. Our superintendents receive no job-related sabbaticals, exchange arrangements, executive training (except in rare cases), or any of the other necessary "perks" that so enhance the performance of their approximate opposite members in other fields.

Finding New Leaders. Current superintendents are worried about recruiting future district leaders. According to the AASA, districts will need to hire nearly 8,000 new superintendents, replacing well over half of the nation's 13,500 superintendents by 2008. Eighty-eight percent of superintendents surveyed agreed that the shortage of applicants for the position is "a serious crisis in American education."

These factors are contributing to this brewing crisis:

- The average time to fill a superintendent vacancy has more than doubled from about four months a decade ago to about 11 months today.

- Although 91 percent of superintendents agreed strongly in a 2000 poll that their work has provided "real career satisfaction," only 65 percent say they would "truly recommend the profession of superintendent as a meaningful and satisfying career."
- In the country's largest urban districts, the average tenure of superintendents dropped from 2.7 years in 1997 to 2.3 years in 1999, according to a survey by the Council of Great City Schools of 48 member districts. Indeed, some evidence suggests that turnover is worst in the big cities that compete most fiercely for leaders for the nation's most challenging districts.

Part of the problem is inadequate compensation. Although superintendents earned an average salary of about $106,000 in the 1998–99 school year, according to the Educational Research Service, the range is quite broad. Whether the salary for a given superintendency adequately compensates for the increased responsibilities and pressures of the job remains questionable. For example, an educator makes a bigger leap in salary by moving from teacher to principal (an average increase of about $33,000) than by moving from principal to superintendent (about $26,000), according to IEL's *The U.S. School Superintendent: the Invisible CEO.* Perhaps that is why the most common reason superintendents leave their position is to work in a better-paying school district. Indeed, 90 percent of superintendents in a recent poll confirmed that better pay and benefits are "a strong incentive to change jobs."

Crisis in the Superintendency?

Percentage of superintendents surveyed nationwide who agree/disagree that the applicant shortage represents a crisis in the superintendency:

Agree Strongly	50
Agree Somewhat	37.8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.8
Disagree Somewhat	1.8
Disagree Strongly	0.5

Source: Cooper, B., Fusarelli, L.D. & Carella, V.A. (2000). *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency? The Results of a National Survey.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

School board members, on the other hand, usually serve as part-time volunteers. Most are unpaid or receive minimal stipends for their public service. But they are nearly always in the public eye, and this visibility potentially can be used as a springboard to attractive positions in both the public and private sectors.

Restructuring School District Leadership

What little attention the problems of school district governance and leadership have received in the current era of highly publicized school reform has centered mostly on problem-plagued large urban systems. Yet an undeniable need exists to create and adapt strategies, styles and examples of effective leadership to meet the unique circumstances of all types of school districts. Across the country, school district leaders profess a desire to learn as much as they can about the significant characteristics of successful leadership and of clearly defined arrangements that work.

Three Related Types of Leadership

The discussions of the Task Force on School District Leadership yielded a broad consensus that the three often overlapping (and equally often complementary) kinds of leadership described here represent the range within which most school district leadership operates. A good leader should be able to use elements of all three.

Organizational Leadership

The main leadership forces facing district leaders are organizational. Leaders must be able to establish expectations or norms of teaching and learning for administrators and teachers alike while building organizational systems to support them and maintaining a professional climate that encourages practitioners to continue to learn. Developing and managing the resources necessary to support the instructional system must be high-level priorities at all times. And holding professionals responsible for implementing quality instruction in classrooms and schools in order to reach desired goals is non-negotiable. How to do all this in school districts that vary widely in size, demographics, and quality of performance is and always will be among the thorniest dilemmas of school leadership, on a par with locating leaders with the capacity, expertise, and motivation to do the job.

Public Leadership

Given the increasingly political nature of education and its very visible profile as a national issue, district leaders must recognize more clearly than ever before that their spotlighted role is occurring at a time when an explosion of information and popular debate is happening. Too many district leaders assume their posts embarrassingly uninformed about how to deal with this salient aspect of their job. Effective communication among board members, superintendents, district and school staff, as well as parents, students, and community members is not only essential, it can make the vital difference between success and failure. District leaders must be comfortable with managing media relations, public meetings and politically-inspired pressures, and they must be adept at developing both permanent and temporary coalitions with often disparate community groups. Without such abilities, even the most professional stewardship of a district's affairs can come up short. It is not enough for school leaders to claim an awareness of these widely underrated facets of school leadership; good leaders are those who work ceaselessly to improve their skills as public personalities.

Instructional Leadership

Establishing a clear vision for teaching and learning is the first critical step in planning by any school district. Around the objective of high achievement for all students are arrayed often incompatible goals, values, and strategies. The latter include equity and access for all students; creating safe, nurturing learning environments; providing educators with professional development opportunities

(a chronically undervalued need) as well as resources on effective curriculum and practice; making effective use of instructional technologies, and using accountability measures to spur student improvement.

Student learning provides the lens for focusing leadership priorities at all levels from the classroom and principal's office to district and state-level leadership. But real learning seldom takes place without sensitive yet forceful guidance from those who fill education's leadership positions—leaders who focus on the importance of developing high-performing organizations, enlightened public attitudes, and a realistic set of priorities. Today's leaders will have to review their existing organization's components to make sure they are aligned to support student performance and then determine whether reordering them is appropriate.

Where are the "Models?"

Although several trends in district leadership have been labeled as "models," specific information on the structure of most of them is sketchy, and few, if any, are actually models in the accepted meaning of the term. Rather, the more successful districts function as well as they do by employing what can be more accurately described as sets of arrangements. What follows here illustrates the rough parameters of the more conspicuous arrangements.

Policy Governance Leadership

The chief feature of the policy governance "model" is its strict delineation of the roles of the board as policy-maker and the superintendent as administrator, as explained by Atlanta consultant John Carver, who notes that "one without the other is unfair."

Under the policy governance arrangement, school boards should:

- serve as the general public's trustees and purchasing agents for education, and be held fully accountable for the performance of the superintendent and the school system;
- act collectively and assert authority only as a full board, not individually, declaring that staff may ignore directives and requests from individual board members;
- treat the superintendent as a chief executive officer who wields exclusive authority over his or her staff and who is exclusively accountable for meeting board expectations;
- authoritatively prescribe "ends" so that neither the public nor the superintendent are confused about what is expected of the school system;
- provide the superintendent with bounded freedom for determining "means," so that the superintendent is empowered to devise and take whatever reasonable steps he or she deems appropriate to reach goals established by the board;
- define goals and limitations in descending order of specificity, beginning in the broadest possible terms and incrementally adding detail, until members are satisfied to allow the superintendent full discretion within the stated parameters; and
- evaluate the superintendent in terms of the performance of the school system against criteria set by the board.

Carver points to Orange County, Florida, as an example of high-quality policy governance. Within limits set by board policy, former Superintendent Dennis Smith ran that 150,000-student district as he deemed proper. The district adopted this arrangement in the late 1990s, and local leaders adhered to a strict division of labor. The board set broad policy lines and Smith administered them. Smith suggested in the March 2000 *American School Board Journal* that it was nearly as hard

for him to bear the burden of administrative responsibility alone as it was for board members to keep out of managerial matters, but he offered high praise for the arrangement, which allowed him to say, "The buck stops with me."

Non-Traditional Leadership

Another kind of district leadership emphasizes administration and features collaborative relationships among new constellations of superintendents and other senior staff members who share the responsibilities which were traditionally handled by a single person. An example is the "Chief Executive Officer/Chief Academic Officer" (CEO/CAO) team leadership method in the schools of San Diego, where Superintendent Alan Bersin is the district's chief executive officer, tending mainly to issues of management, such as district politics, union relations and bond issues. Anthony Alvarado, the district's chancellor of instruction, acts as the district's "chief academic officer," and controls virtually all matters relating to teaching and learning. Though it is too early to declare this partnership a success, it appears to have promise. Each leader—Bersin, a former United States Attorney for southern California, and Alvarado, a former superintendent renowned for raising achievement in two New York City school districts—plays a part tailored to capitalize on his strengths. As a result, the district's 180 schools are incorporating such major changes as the requirement that each principal spend two hours a day in classrooms helping teachers strengthen instruction.

Chicago has taken a different approach to such "distributed leadership." As in San Diego, leadership is divided between Paul Vallas, the chief executive officer, and Cozette Buckney, the chief education officer, though many people see this team as less a partnership and more a case of the chief executive delegating academic responsibilities to a senior staff member. Perhaps more intriguing, however, is the way Chicago school leadership is shared among a wider group of non-educators, including Mayor Richard Daley and his appointed Reform Board of Trustees. Neither Vallas nor Board Chair Gery Chico have educational backgrounds, but they do share a legacy: both were senior aides to Mayor Daley. Other variations of the team approach to district leadership can be found in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Philadelphia.

In recent years, a small but growing number of school boards in large urban areas have been turning to non-traditional superintendents to spur their efforts at reform, and these newcomers are more likely to adopt a team or distributed leadership-type operational mode. New York City and San Diego have hired former corporate lawyers to serve as superintendents, while Los Angeles hired a former governor, and Seattle employed, consecutively, a former military officer and a former business executive.

In Houston, the board went to one of its own, Rod Paige, a former school board member, now the U.S. Secretary of Education, who was also an education school dean. Once in office, Paige became a vigorous proponent of organizational development as a means to strengthening the district's schools. With the help of a state-of-the-art management training program, Houston's administrators have been put on private-sector-style contracts that link their jobs to performance indicators rather than tenure. Many nonacademic services are contracted out to private businesses to enable the district to focus more on its "core competence," teaching and learning. Paige also decentralized management to place more authority and accountability at the school level. In the nearly seven years of Paige's administration, the proportion of Houston students passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills rose and the dropout rate fell, all while the share of low-income pupils grew.

The Task Force is not suggesting that one arrangement works better than others. However, it is urging that all school jurisdictions take a hard look at the quality, qualifications, and growth of their

school leaders and not simply assume that they will take care of themselves. It is an issue that deserves as high a priority as any of those that currently dominate the education debate such as higher standards, tougher tests, accountability, improved teacher quality, smaller class sizes, safety and discipline, and other non-negotiables. **But it is impossible to imagine any community achieving sustained positive results for children unless the adults in charge at the district level are using the same playbook as they work toward shared goals.**

"There is something [in the system] that does not allow good people on boards and as superintendents to do their jobs."

Strategies for Restructuring

IEL's Task Force on School District Leadership urges communities and states to focus on four overlapping strategies to develop a stronger district leadership base:

- Planning for Recruitment and Succession
- Creating and Maintaining an Informed Leadership Base
- Building a Learning Organization
- Holding Leadership Accountable

Some states and communities are exploring more effective approaches in each of these areas. Several of those efforts are described in this paper. No consensus-generated approach is likely to work for every school system, but the practices and resources highlighted here which the Task Force discussed represent promising options.

Planning for Recruitment and Succession

The Task Force found merit in these suggestions for ensuring a continuous flow of talented leaders for tomorrow's school districts:

Districts should design and install fail safe systems for recruiting and holding on to top-quality leaders for their school systems. Given the shortages of qualified candidates for superintendencies in many areas and the prospect of growing shortages in the years ahead, school boards should try to make the jobs more attractive. Job descriptions should be both detailed and candid. Excessively intrusive laws on financial disclosure that discourage worthy lay people from running for school boards should be modified. The leadership potential of school and central office staff who feed the traditional pipeline to the superintendency should be developed and fine-tuned with far more opportunities for training and professional development than most school systems are prepared to support. Salaries need to be made competitive (you usually get what you pay for), and superintendents and other staff members should be able to transfer their pension contributions when they move to other districts.

Major foundations are beginning to acknowledge the need for new ways of getting at the issues that too often have a negative effect on recruitment and succession. The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds are providing almost $4 million over three years to help the New York State Education Department create a comprehensive strategy to attract promising leaders by improving the ways they are recruited, trained and supported.

Attracting and Retaining Women Superintendents

School districts are "very far behind" in reflecting in their leadership the gender make-up of students, according to *The Invisible CEO*, a report on the superintendency published in 1999 by the Institute for Educational Leadership. "The picture is even more bleak when one sees minimal efforts at the state and national levels to even keep track of the problem, let alone to try to solve it," says the report.

Women accounted for only about 12 percent of superintendents. Yet they made up 75 percent of teachers. Moreover, women comprised 57 percent of the central office administrators and 41 percent of principals–the groups from which superintendents traditionally emerge.

Part of the problem, some education experts say, is that the superintendency, and leadership in general, is often understood as an inherently male role. In addition, women may be less willing to make the sacrifices necessary for this highly demanding job, which appears to be tailored more for men, who often assume less responsibility in their personal lives for family and friends. But some public education systems, such as those in Washington State, where 17 percent of the districts were headed by women in 1999, are showing how school districts can provide better balance in their leadership ranks.

School boards should explore gender-specific strategies to attract and retain more women (as well as men) superintendents by:

- Restructuring the superintendency to make it less personally demanding.
- Recognizing more fully the value of leadership approaches that are traditionally considered feminine, such as collaboration, as well as those that are traditionally considered masculine, such as forceful command.
- Calling on current superintendents to identify, encourage and mentor promising female educators, including those who might never have considered futures as administrators. Indeed, women administrators often have the requisite background in instructional leadership so sorely needed in today's schools.

Sources: Hodgkinson, H.L. & Montenegro, X. (1999). *The U.S. school superintendent: The invisible CEO.* Superintendents Prepared. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership. Keller, B. (1999, November 10). In Washington state, a welcoming hand for women chiefs. *Education Week.* Keller, B. (1999, November 10). Women superintendents: Few and far between. *Education Week.*

Districts should target candidates who hold promise as leaders of a large instructional enterprise. School boards must strengthen mechanisms for identifying potential candidates early in their careers, develop executive succession programs to groom strong candidates from within the system, and more actively recruit qualified women and minorities for both the superintendency and board membership. As mentioned earlier, they need to look beyond traditional sources to consider such already proven leaders as business executives, senior government staff members, and military officers. Even if these leaders need additional training to learn the particulars of school management and culture, they can bring needed political skills and demonstrated expertise in getting results and managing large organizations as well as the promise of new kinds of teaming arrangements for handling the complex duties of the superintendent.

Superintendents' Attitudes Toward Steps to Enhance Their Jobs

Superintendent mean ratings of agreement, on a scale of 5.0 (strongly agree), 3.0 (neither agree nor disagree), 1.0 (strongly disagree), with the following statements:

4.43	Higher pay and better benefits would be a strong incentive to candidates in considering a career as a superintendent.
4.42	Districts should consider giving current superintendents more help and support to ensure their well-being and job success.
4.19	Better perks (housing, car, more trips to professional meetings) could help to bring more candidates into the applicant pool.
4.08	Professional and state education organizations should do more to support, recognize and reward the accomplishments of superintendents.
3.93	Universities and other institutions should assist candidates in preparing for job growth and promotion through, for example, training and counseling.
3.39	Tenure for superintendents would bring more candidates into the applicant pool.

Source: Cooper, B., Fusarelli, L.D. & Carella, V.A. (2000). *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency? The Results of a National Survey.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

School board members and superintendents need to support and promote professional standards for their positions. Professional standards for district leaders should be linked to their roles and responsibilities in the areas of organizational, public and instructional leadership and should include information on ethical behavior, minimum qualifications for leadership positions, and relevant state regulations on issues such as public meeting laws and conflict-of-interest provisions for elected or appointed officials. Although recognized as a controversial policy, professional leadership standards should also be linked to student achievement standards as measured by indicators of system-wide achievement and increases in student learning over time, as well as by levels of staff and community satisfaction with the performance of the school system.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), created by the Council of Chief State School Officers in 1994, has published model standards for district and school leaders, including superintendents and principals. ISLLC works with representatives of state education agencies, professional standards boards, and educational leadership organizations such as the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) to set standards and criteria for school leaders. More than two-thirds of the states have adapted or adopted ISLLC's standards for leaders in their school districts.

Once standards of leadership have been adopted, they can provide the basis for professional development programs and accountability measures. For example, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) are working with ISLLC to bring NCATE standards into closer alignment with ISLLC standards and to ensure a strong, effective, modern accreditation process for university programs for district and school leaders.

Is Your State On This List?

Current members of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) are Alabama, American Samoa, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, and the Department of Defense Education Activity.

For more information, contact Amy Mast, Senior Project Associate, ISLLC, Council of Chief State School Officers, One Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-1431, (202) 326-8692, amym@ccsso.org, www.ccsso.org/isllc.html.

Source: ISLLC Web site (www.ccsso.org/isllc.html).

Creating and Maintaining an Informed Leadership Base

School board members, superintendents, and professional associations should promote individualized preparation programs for superintendents and school board members. To bring this about, school districts will have to collaborate closely with colleges, universities, associations, state departments of education, and other leadership organizations involved in preparing promising teachers, principals and other professional staffers to become the next generation of superintendents. Districts might also explore possible links to businesses that provide effective leadership training or support academies for aspiring leaders. Motorola University's Education Systems Alliances, for example, help create systemic change by linking K-12 school systems with the private sector and nonprofit education groups. Experienced school board members might take it upon themselves to initiate a district orientation program to provide new members and superintendents with training customized to deal with district-specific issues. Non-traditional training opportunities should be examined and new collaborations encouraged to ensure that new ways of thinking and current issues are continually addressed in the professional preparation of district leaders.

States and school districts should work together to offer school board members, many of whom are unevenly proficient in educational and leadership issues, opportunities for instruction on their roles and responsibilities in order to supplement what they typically know about education. Tennessee, for example, mandates that each local board member participate in seven hours of orientation in the first year of service. Texas law requires that new board members take part in a district orientation session covering local board policies, procedures, objectives, and priorities. The law also mandates that members receive a basic orientation to the Texas Education Code and specific legal obligations.

Promising Practices: Superintendents Prepared

Recognizing that the pipeline of future superintendents is falling short at a time when strong leadership is more critical than ever, the Institute for Educational Leadership, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and the McKenzie Group, Inc. formed Superintendents Prepared, a consortium to develop highly skilled leaders of diverse backgrounds for the nation's largest urban school systems.

The key training components for the one-year Superintendents Prepared experience were:

- a one-week institute to assess leadership strengths and weaknesses, attend expert briefings and seminars on critical education issues, and develop an individual leadership development plan;
- an individual plan to be completed within the year, including on-the-job assignments, reading and discussion programs, and work with a superintendent mentor;
- ongoing coaching/mentoring activities between consortium staff and the participant;
- on-site leadership observations of complex working environments such as major businesses, large school districts, mayors' offices and state governments; and
- a concluding institute focusing on additional educational issues, management skills, and marketing and placement preparations.

With funding from the Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Prudential Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, Superintendents Prepared aimed to identify diverse talent in educational leadership, provided a thorough and individualized series of development experiences while participants remained on their jobs, and helped place candidates in top leadership posts. A program like this is especially important in an era of growing diversity among students and a rising awareness of the need to provide stronger leadership for student learning.

Graduates are currently at the helm in such districts as Columbus, Ohio, and Rochester, New York, and are taking the lead in various initiatives across the country including Wallace-Reader's Digest and Edison Schools. The Superintendents Prepared design is being adapted for statewide implementation in Alabama.

For more information, contact Barbara McCloud, Program Director, Superintendents Prepared, Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 822-8405, mccloudb@iel.org, www.iel.org.

Source: Institute for Educational Leadership web site (www.iel.org).

State leaders, colleges and universities, professional associations, businesses, and other leadership organizations should provide ongoing training opportunities to help school board members and superintendents update their leadership knowledge and skills on a continuing basis. Board members, superintendents and other central office staff should be provided with regular opportunities to assess their learning needs and address them through the best available continuing education opportunities. Training in such areas as district-level policy-making, board-superintendent relationships, and new state policy initiatives, which have increased markedly in both number and magnitude during the past two decades, should also be offered on a regular basis. A Kentucky education re-

form law, for example, requires between 4 and 12 hours of professional development annually for all board members.

Joint self-evaluation and professional development sessions for superintendents and board members can help promote collaboration and professional growth. For example, the California School Boards Association's Masters in Governance program, an innovative continuing education program that recognizes the need for board and superintendent to learn and work closely together, helps school board members and superintendents function effectively as "governance teams." Participants who complete all coursework in the two-year series of sessions receive a Masters in Governance certificate.

Weaknesses of Training for District Leaders

The top items identified by superintendents as the major weaknesses of superintendents' graduate study programs (based on percentage of superintendents responding) were:

Lack of hands-on application	19.8 %
Inadequate access to technology	18.9 %
Failure to link content to practice	16.5 %

Source: Glass, T., Bjork, L. & Brunner, C.C. (2000). *The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Building a Learning Organization

Having focused their districts on the imperative of improving student achievement, leaders must align their organizations to support this goal. There are many possible ways which span a gamut that includes a strategic planning process, gap analysis, the self-assessments developed by the National School Boards Association in its *Key Work of School Boards Guidebook*, the Baldrige Award Criteria for Education, or any number of other tools to start the process of determining if district restructuring is needed and the nature and extent of the restructuring. Public conversations with parents, students, teachers, school and district administrators, community groups, businesses, local officials, and other interested parties should be a mandatory part of the process. Participants must understand that there will be no easy solutions and that the process may become messy and ridden with dilemmas. But the results will be worth the effort. Since experts in systems change say it usually takes five years for change to occur at all levels of an organization, the restructuring plan should include a multi-year timeline, a realistic number of changes to be implemented, resources to support the process, and the commitment of district leaders and stakeholders to see the process through without rushing it.

The eventual product would be a learning organization in which practitioners inform the system and leaders support it, creating a continually renewing cycle. The organization would reflect its community's focus on supported learning and accountability, and have a coherent, effective structure for ongoing reform to manage changing content and roles. Communication and lessons learned would flow freely throughout the organization. Central office functions would be organized to support teaching and learning. Leadership decisions would be filtered through the vision of student achieve-

ment, and timely data would be available to inform those decisions. Community members and other stakeholders would be actively involved, and everyone would be on the same page about what they should be doing. Data would be readily available for evaluating progress toward the agreed-upon goals and holding leaders accountable for that progress.

Getting Down to Business in Education

As school boards and superintendents increasingly turn to the business world for suggestions on how to strengthen organizational performance, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which has special guidelines adapted specifically for education, offers a promising approach.

The seven criteria for the Award provide a framework for any organization, whether a business or a school district, to improve its competitiveness by strengthening customer service and organizational performance. The seven criteria are Leadership, Strategic Planning, Student and Stakeholder Focus, Information and Analysis, Faculty and Staff Focus, Education and Support Process Management, and Organizational Performance Results. The award, established in 1987 and managed by the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), is named for the late U.S. Secretary of Commerce who advocated quality management as a key to economic success. As public school systems face increasing pressure to be globally competitive, improve performance and become publicly accountable for results, increasing numbers of school boards and superintendents are looking to Baldrige for answers.

Baldrige provides a set of guidelines for assessing performance and developing plans for improvement. In evaluating leadership, for example, the criteria focus on how school leaders set goals, establish rigorous standards for student learning, and help schools serve the community.

NIST adapted the award criteria for education in 1995. Since then, more than 15,000 education organizations, including school districts, have requested information on the criteria.

With help from Baldrige, for example, schools in Pinellas County, Florida, have made significant changes–and boosted student achievement. Since 1993, the 115,000-student school district has improved standardized test scores by as much as 30 percentile points in a year's time.

To help spark similar successes, the National Alliance of Business has partnered with 25 other business and education organizations to form "BiE IN," the Baldrige in Education Initiative.

For more information, contact BiE IN, c/o National Alliance of Business, 1201 New York Avenue NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005, (800) 787-2848.

Source: BiE IN web site (www.nab.com/content/educationimprovement/QualityManagement_Baldrige/index.htm).

The roles and responsibilities of school board members, superintendents, and other members of the leadership team should be spelled out as part of whatever restructuring process takes place. The school board's role as the school district's policymaking body and the superintendent's role as the school district's chief executive for student learning should always be clearly defined. District and state leaders should, for example, consider how to mitigate the often excessive politicization of school board elections. State and local policies to clarify the board's specific responsibilities and expectations should be discussed. Additional policies to stabilize and support school board leadership should also be considered; these could include staggering terms of office to enhance continuity and developing guidelines for hiring and evaluating the superintendent or management team to whom the day-to-day administration of the district is delegated. Standards for school boards, accountability for those standards, training on standards and assessments, better information and communications, and an understanding of how to work with the business sector could also provide stability, focus, and sources of power for more effective governance.

Leaders should consider measures to reduce or eliminate school board practices such as designating subcommittees that focus on areas such as personnel or curriculum and that may unintentionally encourage the micromanagement of district employees. Texas legislators, for example, recently altered the law describing the role of the school board to indicate that the board "oversees" school district operations but does not "manage" them, as the law used to say. This change helped clarify the oversight role of the board in relation to the management responsibilities of the superintendent.

District and state leaders should discuss policies clarifying the superintendent's roles and responsibilities for developing the annual budget, providing data and advice for board decision-making, overseeing implementation of the district's educational program, directing efforts to improve teaching and learning, and managing all personnel and financial business. For example, a 1993 Massachusetts education reform law spells out that virtually all personnel decisions should be made by district superintendents and principals who may pursue various structural options (contracting out, distributing leadership among a team of people with different skills, and others) as districts such as San Diego, Chicago and Houston have done.

Indicators of School Board Effectiveness

An effective school board:

1. provides leadership for public education and is an advocate for the educational needs and interests of children and youth;
2. works to influence policies of state and local governmental bodies and other organizations whose decisions affect children and youth;
3. seeks and responds to many forms of parent and community participation in the school district;
4. has a comprehensive program for communications with its various constituencies, including policies and procedures for working with the media;
5. encourages and respects diversity, deals openly and straight-forwardly with controversy within the board and the community, and follows democratic decision-making processes;
6. uses strategic planning to set educational goals and determines the means to accomplish them;
7. works to ensure an adequate flow of resources and achieves equity in their distribution;
8. establishes and follows policy to govern its own policy-making decisions;
9. exercises continuing policy oversight of education programs and their management, drawing information for this purpose from many sources and knowing enough to ask the right questions;
10. establishes and implements procedures for selecting and evaluating the superintendent;
11. recognizes the dilemma of distinguishing policy from administration and periodically clarifies these separate areas of responsibility in consultation with the superintendent;
12. promotes constructive relations with its employees and works to create conditions that enhance productivity;
13. establishes clear expectations for the conduct of its members;
14. establishes and follows policies and procedures to manage its own operations; and
15. has procedures for self-assessment and invests in its own development, using diverse approaches that address the needs of the board as a whole, as well as those of individual board members.

Source: Danzberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W. & Usdan, M.D. (1992). *Governing public schools: New times, new requirements.* Washington, DC: The Institute for Educational Leadership.

Promising Practices: Key Work of School Boards

To provide school board members with tools and information they can use to improve leadership for student learning, the National School Boards Association recently launched its Key Work of School Boards project. The project identifies eight "key actions" of boards:

- vision,
- standards,
- assessment,
- accountability,
- alignment,
- learning environment,
- collaborative partnerships, and
- continuous improvement.

The resulting *Key Work of School Boards Guidebook*, using a systems approach, provides tools such as self-assessments to help board members determine how much they have accomplished–and what they have yet to achieve. Of particular interest to readers of this report are side-by-side comparisons that delineate the different responsibilities of superintendents and school board members in each of these eight priority areas.

The project's Web site (www.nsba.org/keywork) contains a wealth of additional information including recommended board actions, public engagement strategies, effective school district practices, and contact information for the districts described.

For more information, contact Hilary LaMonte, Resource Exchange Network Manager, National School Boards Association, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 838-6722, hlamonte@nsba.org, www.nsba.org.

Source: Gemberling, K.W., Smith, C.W. & Villani, J.S. (2000). *The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook.* Arlington, VA: National School Boards Association; Key Work of School Boards web site (www.nsba.org/keywork).

School board members and superintendents should facilitate improved communication and interaction with the public. Communities should expect the superintendent and board members to attend community meetings, speak about schools, invite citizens to visit or volunteer in schools, and develop partnerships with businesses and other community organizations. The Pittsburgh board, for example, enlisted the help of the International Center on Collaboration, a Naples, Florida-based consulting firm, to facilitate public engagement activities that resulted in a school district strategic plan incorporating input from a wide spectrum of community members.

District leaders also should include teachers and principals, the "front line" staff representing leaders' most direct connection with the wider community. District leaders can generate both greater educational success and stronger community relations by involving teachers and principals (who likely will outlast the terms of most board members and superintendents) in the design, not merely the implementation, of efforts to improve student learning. Finally, to demonstrate their commitment to student learning, district leaders should support new options for families, such as charter schools and public school choice, that might provide more diverse opportunities for children and compelling incentives for system-wide improvement.

Holding Leadership Accountable

State policymakers should adopt professional standards, professional development requirements and accountability systems for superintendents and school board members. As stated earlier, standards for district leadership must include measurable indicators of district-wide achievement and progress over time; many states are setting these goals in the context of their new, standards-based testing systems for students. In ISLLC's accountability design, test scores are one of several components. Its standards indicate the knowledge, performances, and other factors that are required of school administrators that test scores alone will not illuminate.

ISLLC also has worked with the Educational Testing Service and the pilot states of Missouri and North Carolina to develop the School Superintendent Assessment, based on the Consortium's standards. The first-ever national licensing exam for superintendents, administered in October 2000, is providing a seal of leadership readiness for some 100 graduate students in the pilot states who aspire to become superintendents. Although a highly debatable idea, examinations and certifications for school board members have also been proposed by board members who are concerned about ensuring qualified candidates for school governance positions.

Professional development for district leaders should be standards-based, hands-on, frequent and geared to actual leadership roles. Under Louisiana's initiative to provide "corrective actions," or assistance, to low-performing schools, for example, district leaders are required to develop plans to "reconstitute" schools that consistently show inadequate achievement. School reconstitution would be an obvious topic for professional development if there is no local expertise with that process.

School board members should evaluate district performance annually against established professional standards of leadership for student learning and hold superintendents accountable for meeting those standards. Fair and rigorous evaluations should include multiple measures of student performance in relation to academic standards, as well as other measures of success in a district such as progress toward meeting established goals and objectives into which the various economic and social challenges that the school system faces in promoting achievement have been factored. Districts should publicly report progress toward these goals on a regular basis, and they should solicit the opinions of concerned citizens.

Professional goals should be established for school board members and the superintendent or administrative team, and progress toward those goals should be measured and evaluated. Assessments of performance for superintendents, principals and other salaried staff should include clearly delineated expectations and goals and an indication of where the resources to achieve them may be found. Continuous improvement plans, peer reviews, incentive awards, or penalties for poor performance are other potential accountability components.

Promising Practices: Beaverton District Profile

Beaverton School District #48 in Oregon maintains its public accountability by publishing and frequently updating a District Profile that presents key indicators of school system performance. For example, the November 2000 profile reports that *Beaverton students compare favorably to other Oregon students in Reading & Literature, and most are making progress towards the rigorous new standards.* At all grade levels, a higher percentage of Beaverton students met or exceeded statewide standards in Reading & Literature than in any other jurisdiction in Oregon. Within Beaverton, 5th and 8th graders had higher Reading & Literature scores in spring 2000 than in spring 1999. Slightly fewer 3rd graders and sophomores met 2000 standards compared to 1999.

In easy-to-read text and numerous tables and charts, the detailed report provides data on indicators such as the percentages of students meeting standards on state tests for math and English; the percentage of secondary students with a grade point average of at least 2.0; recent SAT scores for students in Beaverton, Oregon, and the nation; the percentage of students in postsecondary education one year after graduation; dropout rates; parent and student ratings of their schools; supervisor ratings of staff quality; staff job satisfaction ratings, and the number of recent safety-related incidents.

Source: Beaverton School District web site (www.beaverton.k12.or.us/District_Info/district_profile.htm).

School board members, superintendents, professional associations, and state and national policymakers should promote increased research on successful models and analyses of effective leadership. District leaders want to know what methods of governance and administration models are effective, why, and how they may be adapted for local use. To ascertain this, a two-stage analysis is needed. The models must first be described and analyzed, and then their effectiveness must be determined. Since effectiveness is defined in terms of student achievement, data must be collected at the district, state, and national levels that include student learning results, changes over time, and disaggregated findings for various subsets of students. District performance data, coupled with corresponding information on district leadership models, should inform discussions of how leadership contributes to improvements in student learning. Specific data are needed on both superintendents and school boards, particularly regarding school board effectiveness, which has been inadequately studied.

As the value of data-based decision-making has been more widely recognized in recent years, the number of states requiring schools to use student outcome data in improvement planning, as in Colorado, Florida and Texas, has increased. By 2001, the National School Boards Association expects to begin training state and local school board leaders on how to use data for decision-making.

Promising Practices: Reporting Results

Perhaps the most time-honored and effective way for a school system to communicate with its public is through report cards. Increasingly, community members are asking for report cards on the performance of schools as well as students. *Reporting Results*, a major research project by *Education Week* and A-Plus Communications, describes what information parents and taxpayers want to know about school performance and the best ways to communicate this information.

"Just as report cards for students grab the attention of parents, report cards for schools have an audience that is ready to listen," the report concludes. "Poll after poll shows that improving education is the public's top priority. Accountability reports that document these improvements provide education leaders with a magic moment to communicate with their community."

The report makes 10 recommendations for district leaders:

- Don't assume that anyone has seen school accountability reports.
- Make student performance prominent . . .
- . . . but report a lot more than test scores, such as data about safety and teacher qualifications.
- Compare schools and students to each other–and to fixed standards.
- Be cautious about the labels assigned to schools.
- Don't overdo demographic data.
- Make reports short and easy to read.
- Help people understand how to use the information.
- Understand that educators and the public sometimes have different priorities.
- And most important, ask people in your own community what counts to them–in addition to whatever the state mandates.

Sources: A-Plus Communications. (1999). *Reporting Results: What the Public Wants to Know.* Arlington, VA: Author; and A-Plus Communications Web site (www.ksagroup.com/aplus/index.html).

Taking Ownership

Making changes such as those suggested here do not come easily. Bringing change about, and doing it right, demands that leaders in state and local jurisdictions, colleges and universities (along with organizations that provide modern leadership training), school districts, and communities all make sizable contributions of expertise, resources, and creative energy.

State and Local Policymakers: Ask school district leaders to help set qualifications for school board members and rethink state policy to limit the politicization of boards (an extraordinarily sensitive but necessary action). Set clear goals for the district for student learning and provide flexibility for implementation strategies. Provide sensitively targeted technical assistance and resources for schools known to be struggling with goals for student achievement. Train district leaders in data-based decision-making, including understanding and interpreting data from the schools' accountability systems.

Higher Education and Leadership Development Organizations: Work with district leadership to develop hands-on, reality-based preparation and professional development programs for district leaders—school board members, superintendents, and central office staff. Solicit financial backing for such training from foundations, philanthropists, business, and state legislatures.

Businesses: Get involved with and support your school district. Be prepared to share your resources and expertise in areas ranging from organizational change to customer service. Be clear on what you expect of the school system and district leaders to prepare students for the world of work. Encourage employees to serve on school boards. Acquaint yourselves with the growing literature on how to become involved.

Local School Board Members and Superintendents: Never forget that improving student achievement is the *sine qua non* of the nation's schools. Focus your organizational strength and assets on this task. Set measurable goals and clarify roles and responsibilities. Seek professional development opportunities to manage the complex and constantly changing demands of district leadership. Work with the state to discuss ways to support school district governance and administrative structures.

Community Leaders and Community Organizations: Explore opportunities for partnerships and collaboration with the school district to maximize resources and expertise. Offer to facilitate meetings and other outreach efforts for the district. Take the lead in building community consensus around shared education goals and measurable indicators of success.

"We have different points of view but are aimed at the same goal."

In the Final Analysis

District leaders do their thing in an arena that is perpetually besieged by a *potpourri* of often conflicting forces: state laws and regulations, federal mandates, decentralized school management, demands for greater public school accountability, changing demographics, the school choice movement, competing community needs, limited resources, partisan politics, crumbling and outdated school buildings and equipment, suddenly expanding or contracting enrollments, legal challenges, shortages of qualified teachers and principals, general lack of respect for the education profession, the digital divide, and the list goes on.

Given these often inhibiting circumstances, the need for informed, committed district leaders who can move school systems toward high levels of achievement for all students is greater than ever. Voter turnout, which often drops precariously to less than ten percent for school board elections—not surprising in a country where only one in four families has a child in primary or secondary school—and the ever-growing politicization of school boards are deterrents to attracting talented citizens to serve. Some states can already foresee a turnover of as many as 90 percent of their superintendents in the first decade of the new century. Across the country, states and districts are already experiencing acute shortages or high turnover rates of qualified applicants for superintendencies. And there are no signs that this unsettling picture will improve.

The challenge for district leaders, therefore, is to unite the community around a common vision for the schools and then structure district leadership and the school system around that vision. To do this, leaders will have to focus on involving the community in planning for leadership succession, developing and maintaining an informed leadership base, structuring a learning organization, and holding leadership accountable for gains in student achievement. District leaders will need expertise in organizational, public, and instructional leadership to succeed.

Some communities have already begun the process, but they are handicapped by chronic shortages of data, information, and research on effective school governance and administrative arrangements, particularly the "non-traditional models" that are gaining attention in some large urban areas.

The following section of the report provides a collection of tools and resources to help begin this work. Please consult these materials and our web site (www.iel.org) in your work and stay in contact with the Institute for Educational Leadership for more information on its *School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative.*

Leadership In Your Own Backyard

Leadership in public education is a matter of guiding a community to realize its potential to do the best job it can for its children. There are many priorities but only limited resources with which to succeed. And no action can really succeed without consensus for a focused, shared vision of what must be done. IEL encourages you to:

- ***Gain consensus*** on and backing for your community's vision and goals for its schools. If held strongly enough, they will help guide the community in a constructive fashion, especially when the issues become complicated and controversial, and the going gets rough.
- ***Involve*** representatives from as many different sectors as possible—education, government, businesses from both the "old" and "new" economies, the communications media, and others.
- ***Do your homework*** by collecting as much data and information as possible about where your school district stands—compared to its previous performance, the goals you have established, and the situation in districts with characteristics generally similar to yours.
- ***Examine the leadership issues*** within the broader framework of the community's shared education goals. Analyze your district's leadership structures with a view to improving them if they appear to fall short.
- ***Discuss and debate*** the particular leadership challenges, opportunities and options for action described in this report, using your district's shared education goals as the framework for addressing leadership issues.
- ***Plan*** specific actions that will work for your community, so that your friends and neighbors are aware of the significance of school leadership issues.

Many of these actions are basically political, and leaders must engage the general public in this work. Taxpayers want good schools and generally agree that this will require investment. But most people have little understanding of the importance of school district leadership. This means you will need to start building public awareness and support for options such as those described here.

Suggested Questions

To provide a starting point for discussion in your community, this report provides a number of questions that you might want to examine. Some may appear repetitive, but the fact that they came up repeatedly during the Task Force's meeting indicates the level of concern felt by participants.

Planning for Recruitment and Succession

- Are we facing a shortage of qualified, interested candidates for district leadership positions? What data do we need to answer this question? Where can we find the data?
- Is there only limited interest from qualified citizens in serving on the school board? Why?
- Do we mostly rely on self-selection to deliver district leaders, or do we have a strategy to identify and develop promising future leaders early in their careers? How do we nurture qualities of leadership among principals and district central office staff?
- How can we promote better public understanding of district leadership roles?
- Do we publicize detailed job descriptions for district leadership posts?
- How can we assure genuine equity for women and minorities in selecting new leaders?

- Would nontraditional candidates from business or nonprofit organizations be appropriate for the superintendency in our district? How can we stimulate their interest?
- Do we have clearly stated professional standards and guidelines for school board members and the superintendent, such as those offered by AASA and NSBA?
- What criteria or indicators of district performance can we use to evaluate district leaders' performance?

Creating and Maintaining an Informed Leadership Base

- What types of preparation should our superintendent and school board members receive before taking office? What preparation have they received so far?
- How can we ensure that district leaders receive the up-to-date training they need to be effective leaders for student learning? Should we promote training mandates for district leaders?
- How might orientation for board members better equip them with knowledge and skills regarding their roles, relevant legal issues and education topics?
- Does the superintendent receive any formal preparation beyond the administrative coursework that most principals complete?
- Do board members and the superintendent have regular opportunities to state and meet their learning needs?
- How might the school district work more closely with higher education and other leadership organizations, including the business community, to provide effective preparation and professional development?
- What can business and civic leaders do to encourage the community's most capable and respected citizens to serve on the school board?

Building a Learning Organization

- Does our district have a vision for learning? What is it? Does it need to be updated?
- How do we measure the effectiveness of district leadership? How effective are our leaders?
- What resources are available, both inside and outside the system, to support a process of reconfiguring for better leadership?
- How do we ensure that the community is involved in the restructuring process?
- What kind of policy environment does the state create for district leadership? Does it adequately define the scope of the public education program and the roles and responsibilities of district leaders in implementing that program?
- How are the duties and authority of the school board defined? Are board members focused exclusively and creatively on making district policy or do they tend to branch into the district's day-to-day work life? How do board members police themselves?
- How are the duties and authority of the superintendent defined? Is the superintendent granted the freedom and flexibility to use whatever reasonable means he or she judges to be appropriate?
- Has the state adopted professional standards for all school board members and superintendents, such as those advanced by ISLLC? What provisions should the state make for the professional development of board members and superintendents?

Holding Leadership Accountable

- Assuming that the state sets specific expectations for district leaders and provides support to help them meet those expectations, how should the state hold board members and superintendents publicly accountable for district performance?
- Do we have mechanisms in place to assess the performance of both the superintendent and the school board? Do we assess these leaders regularly, preferably annually?
- Do we report on multiple measures of progress in student learning over time, in addition to other measures of school system success?
- What data are we collecting on superintendent and school board performance? What additional data would help guide decisions about leader effectiveness and ways to make improvements? How could we better collect, interpret and disseminate this information to gain the best contributions of community members to strengthen district leadership?
- How can our superintendent and school board engage the public in more meaningful ways?

Speak Up

To help the Initiative provide the best tools and resources possible for local and regional leadership efforts such as yours, you are encouraged to contact IEL with news about what is happening in your community:

- What local, regional or state actions do you plan to take to address education leadership issues in your area?
- Can you provide examples of effective programs, initiatives or organizations that might provide useful models for others around the country?
- What additional tools, resources or information would help you strengthen school district leadership in your area?
- Has this report been useful to you? How?

IEL hopes to incorporate your input in upcoming publications and the Web site of the Institute for Educational Leadership's School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative. Please contact IEL by any of the following means:

Mary Podmostko, Project Associate
Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
202-822-8405, ext. 31
Fax 202-872-4050
podmostkom@iel.org
www.iel.org

References

A-Plus Communications. (1999). *Reporting results: What the public wants to know.* Arlington, VA: Author. Available at http://www.ksagroup.com/aplus/frames.html

Carver, J. (2000, March). Remaking governance. *American School Board Journal.* Summary available at http://www.asbj.com/2000/03/0300expresslines.html

Cooper, B., Fusarelli, L.D. & Carella, V.A. (2000). *Career crisis in the school superintendency? The results of a national survey.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Council of Chief State School Officers. (1996). *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders.* Washington, DC: Author.

Council of Great City Schools. (2000, March). Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure and salary. *Urban Indicator: A Research Publication, 5* (2).

Danzberger, J.P., Kirst, M.W. & Usdan, M.D. (1992). *Governing public schools: new times, new requirements.* Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Danzberger, J.P. & Usdan, M.D. (2000, April). The role of school boards in standards-based reform. *Basic Education.*

Elmore, Richard F. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership.* Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute.

Gemberling, K.W., Smith, C.W. & Villani, J.S. (2000). *The key work of school boards guidebook.* Arlington, VA: National School Boards Association.

Glass, T., Bjork, L. & Brunner, C.C. (2000). *The 2000 study of the American school superintendency: A look at the superintendent of education in the new millennium.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Goldberg, M.F. (December 2000). Demographics—Ignore them at your peril: An interview with Harold Hodgkinson. *Phi Delta Kappan 82,*(4). Available at http://www.pdkintl.org

Goodman, R.H. & Zimmerman, Jr., W.G. (2000). *Thinking differently: recommendations for 21st century school board/superintendent leadership, governance, and teamwork for high student achievement.* Arlington, VA & Marlborough, MA: Educational Research Service and New England School Development Council. Available at http://www.aasa.org/issues_and _insights/governance

Hodgkinson, H.L. & Montenegro, X. (1999). *The U.S. school superintendent: The invisible CEO.* Superintendents Prepared. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Institute for Educational Leadership. (1993, September). *A framework for redefining the role and responsibilities of local school boards.* Washington, DC: Author.

Institute for Educational Leadership. (1986). *School boards: strengthening grass roots leadership.* Washington, DC: Author.

Keller, B. (1999, November 10). In Washington state, a welcoming hand for women chiefs. *Education Week.* Available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/

Keller, B. (1999, November 10). Women superintendents: Few and far between. *Education Week.* Available at http://www.edweek.org/ew

Lewin, T. (2000, June 8). Leaders from other professions reshape America's schools, from top to bottom. *The New York Times.* Available at http://www.nytimes.com

National Alliance of Business. (1998, Aprii). Business, educators find power in Baldrige to improve schools. *Work•America.*

National School Boards Association. (1999). *Education vital signs 1999.* Alexandria, VA: Author. Available at http://www.asbj.com/evs/99/index.html

National School Boards Foundation. (1999). *Leadership matters: Transforming urban school boards.* Alexandria, VA: Author. Available at http://www.nsbf.org/report/index.html

Reid, K.S. (2000, September 20). Governance report calls for overhaul. *Education Week.* Available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/

Richard, A. (2000, October 25). New test probes superintendents' leadership skills. *Education Week.* Available at http://www.edweek.org/ew/

U.S. Department of Education. (2000, August 21). *Growing pains: The challenge of overcrowded schools is here to stay, A back-to-school special report on the Baby Boom echo.* Washington, DC: Author. Available at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/bbecho00

IEL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Buzz Bartlett
Director, Corporate Affairs
Lockheed Martin Corporation

Bert Berkley
Chairman of the Board
Tension Envelope Corporation

Badi Foster
President-Designate
Phelps-Stokes Fund

Mary Hatwood Futrell
Dean
Graduate School of Education
and Human Development
The George Washington University

James A. Kelly
Founding President
National Board for Professional
Teaching Standards

Floretta Dukes McKenzie
Chairwoman and CEO
The McKenzie Group, Inc.

John May, Treasurer
Partner
New Vantage Partners, LLC

Arvin Mueller
Vice President and Group Executive
General Motors Power Train

Neal R. Peirce
Contributing Editor
The National Journal,

James J. Renier, Chair
Retired Chairman and CEO
Honeywell

Ted Sanders
President
Education Commission of the States

P. Michael Timpane
Senior Advisor for Education Policy
RAND Corporation

Michael D. Usdan
President
The Institute for Educational Leadership

IEL PROGRAMS OF WORK

Developing Leaders
Strengthening School-Family-Community Connections
Connecting and Improving the Systems that Support Children and Youth
Governing
Improving Preparation for Work

Leadership for Student Learning

A Report Series published by the Institute for Educational Leadership on:

Principal Leadership
District Leadership
Teacher Leadership
State Leadership
Urban School Leadership

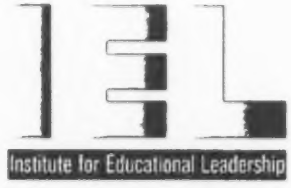
This publication was made possible by grants from:

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the United States Department of Education
The Ford Foundation
The UPS Foundation
The Carnegie Corporation of New York
The Metropolitan Life Foundation

The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Ordering Information

Single copies of this report are available free of charge. For all orders, contact Mary Podmostko via e-mail (podmostkom@iel.org), by fax (202) 872-4050, or in writing at the address below. Copies can also be downloaded from www.iel.org.



1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC, 20036
(202) 822-8405
Fax (202) 872-4050
iel@iel.org
www.iel.org